

McCollum memorandum

op-16-F-2 ONI

7 October 1940

Memorandum for the Director

Subject: Estimate of the Situation in the Pacific and Recommendations for Action by the United States.

1. The United States today finds herself confronted by a hostile Germany and Italy in Europe and by an equally hostile Japan in the Orient. Russia, the great land link between these two groups of hostile powers, is at present neutral, but in all probability favorably inclined towards the Axis powers, and her favorable attitude towards these powers may be expected to increase in direct proportion to increasing success in their prosecution of the war in Europe. Germany and Italy have been successful in war on the continent of Europe and all of Europe is either under their military control or has been forced into subservience. Only the British Empire is actively opposing by war the growing world dominance of Germany and Italy and their satellites.

2. The United States at first remained coolly aloof from the conflict in Europe and there is considerable evidence to support the view that Germany and Italy attempted by every method within their power to foster a continuation of American indifference to the outcome of the struggle in Europe. Paradoxically, every success of German and Italian arms has led to further increases in United States sympathy for and material support of the British Empire, until at the present time the United States government stands committed to a policy of rendering every support short of war with the chances rapidly increasing that the United States will become a full fledged ally of the British Empire in the very near future. The final failure of German and Italian diplomacy to keep the United States in the role of a disinterested spectator has forced them to adopt the policy of developing threats to U.S. security in other spheres of the world, notably by the threat of revolutions in South and Central America by Axis-dominated groups and by the stimulation of Japan to further aggressions and threats in the Far East in the hope that by these means the United States would become so confused in thought and fearful of her own immediate security as to cause her to become so preoccupied in purely defensive preparations as to virtually preclude U.S. aid to Great Britain in any form. As a result of this policy, Germany and Italy have lately concluded a military alliance with Japan directed against the United States. If the published terms of this treaty and the pointed utterances of German, Italian and Japanese leaders can be believed, and there seems no ground on which to doubt either, the three totalitarian powers agree to make war on the United States, should she come to the assistance of England, or should she attempt to forcibly interfere with Japan's aims in the Orient and,



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furthermore, Germany and Italy expressly reserve the right to determine whether American aid to Britain, short of war, is a cause for war or not after they have succeeded in defeating England. In other words, after England has been disposed of her enemies will decide whether or not to immediately proceed with an attack on the United States. Due to geographic conditions, neither Germany nor Italy are in a position to offer any material aid to Japan. Japan, on the contrary, can be of much help to both Germany and Italy by threatening and possibly even attacking British dominions and supply routes from Australia, India and the Dutch East Indies, thus materially weakening Britain's position in opposition to the Axis powers in Europe. In exchange for this service, Japan receives a free hand to seize all of Asia that she can find it possible to grab, with the added promise that Germany and Italy will do all in their power to keep U.S. attention so attracted as to prevent the United States from taking positive aggressive action against Japan. Here again we have another example of the Axis-Japanese diplomacy which is aimed at keeping American power immobilized, and by threats and alarms to so confuse American thought as to preclude prompt decisive action by the United States in either sphere of action. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the last thing desired by either the Axis powers in Europe or by Japan in the Far East is prompt, warlike action by the United States in either theatre of operations.

3. An examination of the situation in Europe leads to the conclusion that there is little that we can do now, immediately to help Britain that is not already being done. We have no trained army to send to the assistance of England, nor will we have for at least a year. We are now trying to increase the flow of materials to England and to bolster the defense of England in every practicable way and this aid will undoubtedly be increased. On the other hand, there is little that Germany or Italy can do against us as long as England continues in the war and her navy maintains control of the Atlantic. The one danger to our position lies in the possible early defeat of the British Empire with the British Fleet falling intact into the hands of the Axis powers. The possibility of such an event occurring would be materially lessened were we actually allied in war with the British or at the very least were taking active measures to relieve the pressure on Britain in other spheres of action. To sum up: the threat to our security in the Atlantic remains small so long as the British Fleet remains dominant in that ocean and friendly to the United States.

4. In the Pacific, Japan by virtue of her alliance with Germany and Italy is a definite threat to the security of the British Empire and once the British Empire is gone the power of Japan-Germany and Italy is to be directed against the United States. A powerful land attack by Germany and Italy through the Balkans and North Africa against the Suez Canal with a Japanese threat or attack on Singapore would have very serious results for the British Empire. Could Japan be diverted or neutralized, the fruits of a successful attack on the Suez Canal could not be as far reaching and beneficial to the Axis powers as if such a success was also accompanied by the virtual elimination of British sea power from the Indian Ocean, thus

OPENING OF A EUROPEAN SUPPLY ROUTE FOR JAPAN AND A SEA ROUTE FOR JAPAN AND MATERIALS TO REACH GERMANY AND ITALY, JAPAN MUST BE DIVERTED IF THE BRITISH AND AMERICAN (F) BLOCKADE OF EUROPE AND POSSIBLY JAPAN (F) IS TO REMAIN EVEN PARTIALLY IN EFFECT.

5. WHILE AS POINTED OUT IN PARAGRAPH (3) THERE IS A STRONG FEELING THAT THE UNITED STATES ARE TO UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION IN EUROPE, THE UNITED STATES IS ABLE TO EFFECTUALLY HOLLY JAPANESE AGGRESSIVE ACTION, AND DO IT WITHOUT LESSENING U.S. MATERIAL ASSISTANCE TO GREAT BRITAIN.

6. AN EXAMINATION OF JAPAN'S PRESENT POSITION AS OPPOSED TO THE UNITED STATES REVEALS A SITUATION AS FOLLOWS:

- | ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| 1. GEOGRAPHICALLY STRONG POSITION OF JAPANESE ISLANDS. | 1. A MILLION AND A HALF MEN ENGAGED IN AN EXHAUSTIVE WAR ON THE PACIFIC CONTINENT. |
| 2. A HIGHLY CENTRALIZED STRONG CAPABLE GOVERNMENT. | 2. OVERSTRETCHED ECONOMY AND FOOD SUPPLY SEVERELY STRAIGHTENED. |
| 3. RIGID CONTROL OF ECONOMY ON A WAR BASIS. | 3. A SERIOUS LACK OF RESERVE OF RAW MATERIALS FOR WAR, ESPECIALLY OIL, IRON AND COTTON. |
| 4. A PEOPLE INURED TO HARDSHIP AND WAR. | 4. TOTALLY CUT OFF FROM SUPPLIES FROM EUROPE. |
| 5. A POWERFUL ARMY. | 5. DEPENDENT UPON DISTANT OVER-SEA ROUTES FOR ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES. |
| 6. A SKILLFUL NAVY ABOUT 2/3 THE STRENGTH OF THE U.S. NAVY. | 6. INCAPABLE OF INCREASING RAW MATERIALS WITHOUT FREE ACCESS TO U.S. OR EUROPEAN MARKETS. |
| 7. SOME STOCKS OF RAW MATERIALS. | 7. MAJOR CITIES AND INDUSTRIAL CENTERS EXTREMELY VULNERABLE TO AIR ATTACK. |
7. IN THE PACIFIC THE UNITED STATES POSSESSES A VERY STRONG DEFENSIVE POSITION AND A NAVY AND NAVAL AIR FORCE AT PRESENT IN THAT OCEAN CAPABLE OF LONG DISTANCE OFFENSIVE OPERATION. THERE ARE CERTAIN OTHER FACTORS WHICH AT THE PRESENT TIME ARE FAVORABLE TO OUR POSITION.
8. THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS STILL HELD BY THE UNITED STATES.
9. FRIENDLY AND POSSIBLY ALLIED GOVERNMENT IN CONTROL OF THE DUTCH EAST INDIES.
10. BRITAIN STILL HOLDS HONGKONG AND SINGAPORE AND ARE FAVORABLE TO US.
11. IMPORTANT CHINESE ARMIES ARE STILL IN THE FIELD IN CHINA AGAINST JAPAN.
12. A SMALL U.S. NAVAL FORCE CAPABLE OF SERIOUSLY INTERRUPTING JAPAN'S SOUTHERN SUPPLY ROUTES.

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ALREADY IN THE THEATER OF OPERATION.

7. A CONSIDERABLE DUTCH NAVAL FORCE IS IN THE OCEAN THAT WOULD BE OF VALUE IF ALLIED TO U.S.

8. A CONSIDERATION OF THE PRESENT SITUATION LEADS TO THE CONCLUSION THAT PROMPT AGGRESSIVE NAVAL ACTION AGAINST JAPAN BY THE UNITED STATES WOULD RENDER JAPAN INCAPABLE OF AFFORDING ANY HELP TO GERMANY AND ITALY IN THEIR ATTACK ON ENGLAND AND THAT JAPAN ITSELF WOULD BE FORCED TO FIGHT ON MOST UNFAVORABLE TERMS OR ACCEPT FAIRLY EARLY COLLAPSE OF THE COUNTRY THROUGH THE FORCE OF BLOCKADE. A PROMPT AND EARLY DECLARATION OF WAR AFTER ENTERING INTO SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT WITH ENGLAND AND HOLLAND, WOULD BE MOST EFFECTIVE IN BRINGING ABOUT THE EARLY COLLAPSE OF JAPAN AND THEN ELIMINATING OUR ENEMY IN THE PACIFIC BEFORE GERMANY AND ITALY COULD STRIKE AT AN EFFECTIVE TARGET. FURTHERMORE, ELIMINATION OF JAPAN WOULD SHORTLY STRENGTHEN BRITAIN'S POSITION AGAINST GERMANY AND ITALY AND, IN ADDITION, SUCH ACTION WOULD INCREASE THE CONFIDENCE AND SUPPORT OF ALL NATIONS AND TEND TO BE FAVORABLE TOWARD US.

9. IT IS NOT BELIEVED THAT IN THE PRESENT STATE OF POLITICAL OPINION THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT IS CAPABLE OF DECLARING WAR AGAINST JAPAN WITHOUT MORE AID AND IT IS HIGHLY PROBABLE THAT FAVORABLE ACTION ON OUR PART MIGHT LEAD THE JAPANESE TO MODIFY THEIR ATTITUDE. THEREFORE, THE FOLLOWING COURSE OF ACTION IS SUBMITTED:

- MAKE AN ARRANGEMENT WITH BRITAIN FOR THE USE OF BRITISH SUBS IN THE PACIFIC, PARTICULARLY SINGAPORE.
- MAKE AN ARRANGEMENT WITH HOLLAND FOR THE USE OF NAVAL FACILITIES AND ACQUISITION OF SUPPLIES IN THE DUTCH EAST INDIES.
- GIVE ALL POSSIBLE AID TO THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT OF CHONGKING-CHINA.
- SEND A DIVISION OF LONG RANGE HEAVY CRUISERS TO THE ORIENT, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS AND SINGAPORE.
- KEEP THE MAIN STRENGTH OF THE U.S. FLEET NOW IN THE PACIFIC IN THE VICINITY OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS.
- INSIST THAT THE DUTCH REFUSE TO GRANT JAPANESE REQUESTS FOR UNDER SEVERE CONSIDERATION, PARTIALLY OIL.
- COMPLETELY ISOLATE ALL U.S. TRADE WITH JAPAN, IN COLLABORATION WITH A SIMILAR EMBARGO IMPOSED BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT.

IF BY THESE MEANS JAPAN COULD BE LED TO COME AN OFFER OF WAR, OR WHEN THE ACTION, AT ALL EVENTS WE MUST BE FULLY PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE THREAT OF WAR.

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opening up a European supply route for Japan and a sea route for Eastern raw materials to reach Germany and Italy, Japan must be diverted if the British and American () blockade of Europe and possibly Japan (?) is to remain even partially in effect.

5. While as pointed out in Paragraph (3) there is little that the United States can do to immediately retrieve the situation in Europe, the United States is able to effectively nullify Japanese aggressive action, and do it without lessening U.S. material assistance to Great Britain.

6. An examination of Japan's present position as opposed to the United States reveals a situation as follows:

Advantages

- 1. Geographically strong position of Japanese Islands.
- 2. A highly centralized strong capable government.
- 3. Rigid control of economy on a war basis.
- 4. A people inured to hardship and war.
- 5. A powerful army.
- 6. A skillful navy about 2/3 the strength of the U.S. Navy.
- 7. Some stocks of raw materials.

Disadvantages

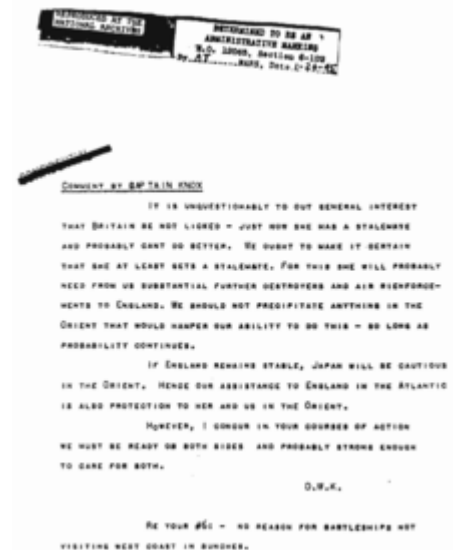
- 1. A million and a half men engaged in an exhausting war on the Asiatic Continent.
- 2. Domestic economy and food supply severely straightened.
- 3. A serious lack of sources of raw materials for war. Notably oil, iron and cotton.
- 4. Totally cut off from supplies from Europe.
- 5. Dependent upon distant overseas routes for essential supplies.
- 6. Incapable of increasing manufacture and supply of war materials without free access to U.S. or European markets.
- 7. Major cities and industrial centers extremely vulnerable to air attack.
- 8. Weather until April rendering direct sea operations in the vicinity of Japan difficult.

7. In the Pacific the United States possesses a very strong defensive position and a navy and naval air force at present in that ocean capable of long distance offensive operation. There are certain other factors which at the present time are strongly in our favor, viz:

- A. Philippine Islands still held by the United States.
- B. Friendly and possibly allied government in control of the Dutch East Indies.
- C. British still hold Hong Kong and Singapore and are favorable to us.
- D. Important Chinese armies are still in the field in China against Japan.
- E. A small U.S. Naval Force capable of seriously threatening Japan's southern supply routes



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already in the theatre of operations.

- F. A considerable Dutch naval force is in the Orient that would be of value if allied to U.S.

8. A consideration of the foregoing leads to the conclusion that prompt aggressive naval action against Japan by the United States would render Japan incapable of affording any help to Germany and Italy in their attack on England and that Japan itself would be faced with a situation in which her navy could be forced to fight on most unfavorable terms or accept fairly early collapse of the country through the force of blockade. A prompt and early declaration of war after entering into suitable arrangements with England and Holland, would be most effective in bringing about the early collapse of Japan and thus eliminating our enemy in the Pacific before Germany and Italy could strike at us effectively. Furthermore, elimination of Japan must surely strengthen Britain's position against Germany and Italy and, in addition, such action would increase the confidence and support of all nations who tend to be friendly towards us.

9. It is not believed that in the present state of political opinion the United States government is capable of declaring war against Japan without more ado; and it is barely possible that vigorous action on our part might lead the Japanese to modify their attitude. Therefore, the following course of action is suggested:

- A. Make an arrangement with Britain for the use of British bases in the Pacific, particularly Singapore.
- B. Make an arrangement with Holland for the use of base facilities and acquisition of supplies in the Dutch East Indies.
- C. Give all possible aid to the Chinese government of Chiang-Kai-Shek.
- D. Send a division of long range heavy cruisers to the Orient, Philippines, or Singapore.
- E. Send two divisions of submarines to the Orient.
- F. Keep the main strength of the U.S. fleet now in the Pacific in the vicinity of the Hawaiian Islands.
- G. Insist that the Dutch refuse to grant Japanese demands for undue economic concessions, particularly oil.
- H. Completely embargo all U.S. trade with Japan, in collaboration with a similar embargo imposed by the British Empire.

10. If by these means Japan could be led to commit an overt act of war, so much the better. At all events we must be fully prepared to accept the threat of war.

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Summary

1. The United States is faced by a hostile combination of powers in both the Atlantic and Pacific.
2. British naval control of the Atlantic prevents hostile action against the United States in this area.

3. Japan's growing hostility presents an attempt to open sea communications between Japan and the Mediterranean by an attack on the British lines of communication in the Indian Ocean.
4. Japan must be diverted if British opposition in Europe is to remain effective.
5. The United States naval forces now in the Pacific are capable of so containing and harassing Japan as to nullify her assistance to Germany and Italy.
6. It is to the interest of the United States to eliminate Japan's threat in the Pacific at the earliest opportunity by taking prompt and aggressive action against Japan.
7. In the absence of United States ability to take the political offensive, additional naval force should be sent to the orient and agreements entered into with Holland and England that would serve as an effective check against Japanese encroachments in South-eastern Asia.

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Comment by Captain Knox

It is unquestionably to our general interest that Britain be not licked - just now she has a stalemate and probably cant do better. We ought to make it certain that she at least gets a stalemate. For this she will probably need from us substantial further destroyers and air reinforcements to England. We should not precipitate anything in the Orient that should hamper our ability to do this - so long as probability continues.

If England remains stable, Japan will be cautious in the Orient. Hence our assistance to England in the Atlantic is also protection to her and us in the Orient.

However, I concur in your courses of action we must be ready on both sides and probably strong enough to care for both.
D.W.K.

Re your #6: - no reason for battleships not visiting west coast in bunches.

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